

NEWS from CPSC

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CPSC Warns Of Hazards from Heaters and Fireplaces

WASHINGTON, D.C. □ The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reminds consumers to follow safety precautions when purchasing and using electric or fuel-fired heaters and fireplaces. □ Most of the deaths and injuries from heaters and fireplaces happen in the winter months, □ said CPSC Chairman Hal Stratton. □ Every home needs working smoke alarms and a carbon monoxide alarm. □

In a recent year, there were about 10,900 residential fires and about 190 deaths associated with portable or fixed space heaters. There were 15,500 fires and 40 deaths associated with fireplaces and chimneys. In addition, an average of about 85 people die each year from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by heating systems, ranges/ovens and water heaters.

Heaters can cause fires if they are placed too close to flammable materials such as drapes, furniture or bedding. Fireplaces can cause fires if the chimney is cracked, blocked or coated with creosote, or if sparks and embers can reach flammable materials. Fuel-burning appliances can cause carbon monoxide poisoning if they are improperly installed, poorly maintained, have compromised venting systems, or are misused.

Heater safety tips:

- Use a heater that has been tested to the latest safety standards and certified by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory. These heaters will have the most up-to-date safety features; older space heaters may not meet the newer safety standards. CPSC worked to upgrade industry standards for electric, kerosene and vented and unvented gas space heaters. Kerosene heaters are required to have an automatic cut-off mechanism that will extinguish the flame if the unit tips over. Most electric heaters also have a similar mechanism to turn the unit off. More guarding around the heating coils of electric heaters and the burner of kerosene heaters also is required to prevent fires. Unvented gas space heaters require oxygen depletion sensors to help prevent carbon monoxide production from inefficient combustion.
- Place the heater on a level, hard and nonflammable surface, not on rugs or carpets or near bedding or drapes. Keep the heater at least three feet from bedding, drapes, furniture and other flammable materials.
- Keep doors open to the rest of the house if you are using an unvented fuel-burning space heater. Make sure your heater meets current safety standards to shut off if oxygen levels fall too low. Make sure your heater is correctly rated for your home. An oversized heater could deplete the available oxygen, causing excess carbon monoxide to be produced. Keep a window in the room open at least one inch to ensure proper ventilation. This helps prevent pollutant build-up and

promotes proper combustion. Follow the manufacturer's instructions to provide sufficient combustion air to prevent carbon monoxide production.

- NEVER leave a space heater on when you go to sleep. Never place a space heater close to any sleeping person.
- Turn the space heater off if you leave the area. Keep children and pets away from space heaters.
- Have gas and kerosene space heaters inspected annually to ensure proper operation.
- Do not use a kitchen range or oven to heat your house because it could overheat or generate excessive carbon monoxide.
- Be aware that mobile homes require specially-designed heating equipment. Only electric or vented fuel-fired equipment should be used.
- Have a smoke alarm with fresh batteries on each level of the house, inside every bedroom, and outside the bedrooms in each sleeping area. In addition, have a carbon monoxide alarm outside the bedrooms in each separate sleeping area.

Fireplace safety tips:

- Have flues and chimneys inspected before each heating season for leakage and blockage by creosote or debris.
- Open the fireplace damper before lighting the fire and keep it open until the ashes are cool. Never close the damper before going to bed if the ashes are still warm. An open damper will prevent build-up of poisonous gases inside the home, especially while the family is sleeping.
- Never use gasoline, charcoal lighter or other fuel to light or relight a fire because the vapors can explode. Never keep flammable fuels or materials near a fire. Never store flammable liquids in your home.
- Never use charcoal in a fireplace because of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Keep a screen or glass enclosure around a fireplace to prevent sparks or embers from igniting flammable materials.

Consumers who would like more information can view a free CPSC booklet, [What You Should Know about Space Heaters](#), or receive it by sending a postcard to Space Heater Booklet, CPSC, Washington, DC 20207.